

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CELEBRATING 100 YEARS 1916-2016



snapshot Augusta Canal National Heritage Area



southern . revival

AUGUSTA CANAL NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA BRINGS HOPE TO HISTORIC CITY

\$21 million
IN LOCAL MATCH
MONIES SEEDED BY
\$5 MILLION IN
FEDERAL FUNDS
OVER A 12-YEAR
PERIOD

The historic Augusta Canal is at the epicenter of the city's renewal, its national heritage area status a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" reports an interviewee in a recent congressionally mandated evaluation. Indeed, that status was sought by leaders looking to find a new path to Augusta's future.

The 11-mile canal, once called the Savannah River's "brightest arm" wrapping around the city, was widely seen as a cesspool by late in the last century. Officials considered draining it for a superhighway. But as Americans rediscovered their waterways, Augustans did too. A levee walling off the Savannah River became a great park, its esplanade animated with flags flown since the days of the Spanish. A visionary plan

*Clockwise left to right: Canal interpretive center, a group of school kids, working headgates. The canal, built in 1847, transformed Augusta. As the city bled population west, businessman Henry Cummings had an answer: harness the river. His main obstacle: the plantation model of success. "Even city folk tried to act like planters, in dress, politics and manners," writes Edward Cashin in *The Brightest Arm of the Savannah*. "Factories were Yankee inventions; places where cruel capitalists exploited workers and cast them out when they became old or ill." Cummings pitched the canal as a way to be free of the North. And when war came, the new Confederate States Powder Works heralded the city's rise as the South's industrial heart, a neo-gothic monument lording over the canal with four square towers at each corner and 12 connecting mills tailing for two miles along the waterway.*

looked to spread the rediscovery to the canal, as a national heritage area key to revitalizing the city's economy. A metamorphosis set in, writes Edward Cashin in *The Brightest Arm of the Savannah, the Augusta Canal 1845-2000*. "People began to define progress by counting quality of life intangibles such as opportunities for recreation and relaxation, respect for wildlife and plant life, an appreciation for the psychological value of a quiet place, and the health benefits of clean, flowing water."



Match Sources:

BUSINESSES
DONATIONS
GRANTS

Benefits:

PROTECTS HERITAGE
BOOSTS ECONOMIES
HELPS COMMUNITIES

ALL PHOTOS AUGUSTA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA EXCEPT AS NOTED; RIGHT © FRANK HADA





Based on the Evaluation's Positive Results, NPS Recommends a Continued Role with Augusta Canal National Heritage Area. Options Include:

- Providing Financial and Technical Assistance
- Coordinating Training
- Providing Operational Guidance
- Partnering with National Parks for Events
- Consulting on Preservation and Conservation Plans and Projects

Augusta Canal National Heritage Area Targets Visitors, Residents, and Students Using:

- Headgates Newsletter, Twitter, Facebook
- Ads in Prominent Magazines Like Southern Living
- Billboards
- Travel Writer Tours
- Co-Op Ads with Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Newspaper Articles
- Festival Booths
- Events Like Take a Walk in the Park, Moonlight Music Cruises, Adopt a Canal Trail, Membership in Canal Keepers Society

In 1989, the Augusta Canal Authority organized and set to work developing a master plan. The handsomely illustrated document proposed to restore the canal's historic mills, put the headgates and locks in working order, capitalize on the setting with hiking trails and boat tours, develop the educational potential, and last but not least facilitate economic development. "What I've seen today is a unique piece of American landscape and American history," Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt said on a tour. "It's a wonderful mixture of human history and the natural environment." Writes Cashin, "Augustans had long known that the canal was locally important, but to hear from a well-traveled national personage that it had national and even human implications caused them to look at the venerable waterway with a new respect."

Today, reports the evaluation, "interviewees were highly consistent in noting the impact of the physical changes . . . and the impact of changes on community pride." The hulking Enterprise Mill—its windows bricked up—was transformed into an impressive edifice with 56 loft apartments on the top and the canal authority, which coordinates the national heritage area, on the bottom. A sprawling 10,000-square-foot "spooling room"—where an army of women once produced some of the

Left: Sibley Mill and chimney of Confederate States Powder Works. Below: Tour in one of the replica "Petersburg Boats," named for a river destination in the pre-canal days, when the shallow-draft vessels ran the rapids. The tours and the visitor center average 15,000 to 20,000 people annually; the towpath is a dig-



itrail, with interpretive panels keyed to smartphones. What visitors encounter is a story key to the "New South," the post-bellum era when the canal was enlarged to increase power and profit. Jones Davis, who transformed a host of Massachusetts factory towns, designed the three-story Enterprise Mill in the fashionable French Second Empire style, with over 200 looms on the first floor. A nearly identical addition was soon built doubling the capacity. Another Davis design, the neo-gothic Sibley Mill—resembling London's Houses of Parliament with its crenellated roof—is also among the canal gems. Officials hope

to turn the Sibley and King Mill into a campus for Georgia Regents University. Surrounded by 2,000 acres of green, "every 18-year-old with a mountain bike and a kayak would be very interested," the mayor told the *Augusta Chronicle*. Said canal authority chairman Richard Isdell: "[The school] doesn't really have a campus now, it's just downtown buildings. This looks like a university."



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Local Funds From:

\$8 MILLION BOND

SPECIAL LOCAL
SALES TAX

HYDROPOWER
GENERATED BY
RESTORED MILLS

WATER SUPPLIED
TO THE CITY

GRANTS FOR STATE AND
LOCAL CAPITAL
PROJECTS

INCOME FROM
INTERPRETIVE CENTER
AND TOURS

South's finest textiles—houses a museum, working loom, theater, visitor center, and offices; reactivated 1920s-era generators, powered by the canal, supply electricity. The surplus is sold to Georgia Power to support heritage area activities. Lease revenue comes from manufacturing tenants, who create jobs. The authority bought the King Mill in 2001, when the owners abruptly ceased operations putting over 300 hands out of work. Most were rehired when the authority leased the building to Ohio's Standard Textile. Likewise, the authority purchased the Sibley Mill in 2010. Today, both are powered by water.

The canal, a catalyst for the South's industrial revolution, is again vital to Augusta, the prime supply of drinking water as well as a flood-control structure and hydropower source. The city's utilities

NPS Funds Provide:

FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY

ABILITY TO LEVERAGE
OTHER RESOURCES

RELIABLE SUPPORT
FOR ACTIVITIES

where the management before was often "piecemeal," in the words of the evaluation.

The National Park Service is there to serve the local intent, the renewal of a great city. Time and again, Augusta has turned to the canal "to reinvent itself and define its destiny"—the prime theme of the visitor center story—and that's no more true than now.

Above: The canal's upper reaches—aglow at night—were until recently places of neglect. Working collaboratively with local governments and agencies, the canal authority has been instrumental in reviving the area as an award-winning recreational destination. Decaying picnic shelters and pavilions, now restored, have been augmented by bridges, boat docks, and meeting spaces. The early vision of the canal as an engine of civic pride and growth is being sustained by the far-sighted leaders today.

and public works departments work hand in hand with the canal authority to preserve what has become precious to the local economy. The hydro plants not only bring a legacy to life, but provide a funding flow for support, as do the interpretive center and boat tours. It's all part of an integrated budget system including an \$8 million bond, a special local sales tax, and grants for public projects at all levels, a vision that inspires city and state to work together for common benefit.

Modest federal investment, through the National Park Service, has been critical. Over a 12-year period, the canal authority matched these funds four times over. Cumulatively, the federal assistance remains at a level far below the authorized \$15 million. The evaluation notes, "one concern is that water revenues and hydropower sales fluctuate. This makes it difficult to project funds year to year." The federal seed ensures consistent success. Some evaluation interviewees stated that the heritage area designation by itself attracts investment. The area's expertise in preservation and tourism also lends consistency in a place



Above and right:

The historic Augusta canal is an epicenter of economic renewal—and recreational excellence—its national heritage area status a “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” reports an interviewee in a recent congressionally mandated evaluation. Indeed, that status was sought by leaders looking to find a new path to Augusta’s future, a story being repeated across the country thanks to transformations fostered by national heritage areas.

Cover: *Music boat cruising the canal.*

